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South Korean Seeks Meeting To End Conflict

Roh's Bid to Ease Tensions
With North Could Lead
To U.S. Troop Cutbacks

By ROBERT S. GREENBERGER

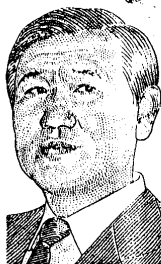
Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
 WASHINGTON—South Korean efforts to ease tension with North Korea could lead, down the road, to a reduction in U.S. forces in Korea, a move Reagan administration officials believe may help cool the anti-Americanism cropping up in South Korea.

In a conciliatory speech at the United Nations yesterday, South Korean President Roh Tae Woo called repeatedly for steps to hasten a "spring-time for peace and reconciliation on the Korean peninsula."

Mr. Roh, making the first U.N. address by a Korean head of state since the formal division of Korea into the Communist North and pro-U.S. South in 1948, proposed a peace conference involving the U.S., the Soviet Union, China, Japan and both Koreas. He also renewed his call for a face-to-face meeting with North Korean leader Kim Il Sung. Mr. Roh is expected to pursue his reconciliation theme in talks at the White House with President Reagan tomorrow.

U.S. analysts said they believe it was the first time Mr. Roh has proposed such an international peace meeting. But they added they expect North Korea to reject the idea. A senior North Korean official is scheduled to address the U.N. today.

The U.S., worried that Korea remains a tinderbox that could set off a superpower conflict, supports Seoul's bid to ease tensions. "We have troops there that could go to war at any hour through no choosing of ours," says a State Department analyst. "The status quo on the Korean peninsula isn't acceptable to us."



Roh Tae Woo

High-Level Review

As a result, the State Department is reviewing its attempts to keep North Korea in diplomatic isolation. The administration is proceeding cautiously because twice before—in September 1983 and March 1987—it extended a diplomatic olive branch toward Pyongyang; each time, the effort was aborted by a North Korean terrorist act. This time, the U.S. is considering such modest measures as resuming limited diplomatic contacts and easing visa restrictions for North Koreans.

Mr. Roh's drive to dissipate tensions with the North could serve the broader interests of Washington and Seoul by relieving the friction between these two allies. Anti-Americanism in South Korea is fed by the prominence of the American military headquarters in downtown Seoul, and by the fact that joint U.S.-Korean forces are commanded by American officers. Koreans' resentment has grown as South Korea has developed into a leading economic power that is clashing frequently with the U.S. on trade matters.

If regional tensions are relaxed, the U.S. would like to take the initiative to improve the Seoul-Washington relationship. "Take the tensions and threat of war away, and we could reconsider our military posture," the State Department official says.

Looking Ahead

South Korean officials foresee a time, perhaps in 10 years, when they will provide their own defense, says Paul Kreisberg, an Asia specialist at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Kim Il Sung, North Korea's leader, has proposed that both sides reduce their forces to 100,000 troops by 1991, but Seoul has rejected the proposal as unrealistic. More than 40,000 U.S. troops are stationed in South Korea.

However, President Roh is prepared to discuss gradual force reductions with North Korea. In his U.N. speech yesterday, Mr. Roh proposed that the two Koreas "agree to a declaration of nonaggression or non-use of force."

The congruence of these U.S. and Korean interests also could help remove a major obstacle in the path of Korean reunification talks. North Korea insists that the removal of U.S. forces is a prerequisite for talks. While that condition is unacceptable to the U.S. and Seoul, a gradual reduction could form part of a compromise.

Mr. Roh made clear yesterday reunification is the ultimate goal. He called the border between the Koreans an "artificial division... drawn through the mid-section of the Korean peninsula."